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NORTHERN FOLK-LORE

ON

WELLS AND WATER;

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF SOME INTERESTING  
WELLS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF INVERNESS  
AND THE NORTH.

BY

ALEX. FRASER

*Accountant.*

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*Dedicated to the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club.*

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## NORTHERN FOLK-LORE ON WELLS AND WATER.

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A RECENT writer, speaking of Well Worship, says :—"A spring of water has always something about it which gives rise to holy feelings. From the dark earth there wells up a pellucid fluid, which, in its apparent tranquil joyousness, gives gladness to all around. The velvet mosses, the sword-like grasses, and the feathery ferns, grow with more of that light and vigorous nature which indicates a fulness of life within the charmed influence of a spring of water, than they do elsewhere. The purity of the fluid impresses itself, through the eye, upon the mind, and its power of removing all impurity is felt to the soul. 'Wash and be clean,' is the murmuring call of the waters, as they overflow their rocky basins, or grassy vases ; and deeply sunk in depravity must that man be who could put to unholy uses one of Nature's fountains. The inner life of a well of waters, bursting from its grave in the earth, may be religiously said to form a type of the soul purified by death, rising into a glorified existence and the fulness of light. The tranquil beauty of the rising waters, whispering the softest music, like the healthful breathing of a sleeping infant, sends a feeling of happiness through the soul of the thoughtful observer, and the inner man is purified by its influence, as the outer man is cleansed by ablution."

Among all nations, in all ages, and amid all climes, well worship and superstitious observances with respect to the uses to which water might be put, have prevailed. The ancient Greeks and Romans peopled hill and dale, wood and grove, well, stream, and lake with divinities of good or evil influence, whose kind offices they besought, or whose power to inflict injury they strove to avert, by peace-offerings and sacrifices. Horace, in his beautiful ode to the small fountain of Bandusia, situated on his charming little rural retreat, gives us a sample of well worship among the Romans, as practised in his day. Addressing the fountain, he says :—

To thee, the goblet, crowned with flowers,  
 The rich libation justly pours ;  
 A goat whose horns begin to spread,  
 And bending, arm his swelling head,  
 Whose bosom glows with young desires,  
 Which war or kindling love inspires,  
 Now meditates his blow in vain,  
 His blood shall thy fair fountain stain.

Virgil frequently alludes to the subject, and, in conformity with Roman ideas, orders the planting of groves around fountains, as the souls of heroes were supposed to inhabit fountains and frequent groves ; and Seneca says, " Where a spring rises or a river flows, there should we build altars and offer sacrifices." From an early period of their history, the Jews seem also to have been infected with ideas of the same kind. In the time of our Saviour, we have preserved for us by the pen of St John the Evangelist, a graphic picture of how a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered, waited for the moving of the water in the pool of Bethesda—"for an angel," it is related, "went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water ; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." Other instances might be adduced, and though no special mention is made of wells in the rebukes administered to the Hebrews by the prophets for their idolatry, there can be little doubt they occupied an important place in the worship of the heathen gods in groves and elsewhere throughout Palestine. Our Roman Catholic friends in later days found the above passage with respect to Bethesda to be to them an invaluable treasure, as is attested by the countenance they gave to many of the ceremonies practised by the common people at so-called holy wells.

Our forefathers, the ancient Celtæ, worshipped wells, streams, and lakes, and had, among other water divinities, a river-god called Divona. Their relations, the ancient Britons and Saxons, were not behind ; and it is interesting to trace the similarity that exists between the forms and objects of worship among the representatives of the Aryan races, however widely they may chance to be scattered.

Canute forbade the worship of heathen gods, the sun or moon, fire, or flood-water, wells, torrents, stones, or trees. It is thought, however, that he meant to put a stop to the propitiating of the demons who were supposed to lurk in wells, rivers, and fountains, rather than to the holy



uses to which some of them were put. In 567 the Synod of Tours protested against the perpetration of "rites unknown to the Church at rocks, or trees, or wells, the marked places of the heathens." At this period, not only wells, but woods, waters generally, and birds and beasts were commonly worshipped. Gregory III., in 740, forbade the Germans to use divinations, consult fountains, or offer sacrifices in sacred groves.

Lakes and rivers were supposed to harbour water bulls and water horses, or kelpies. These could assume various forms, according to pleasure. Marvellous tales are told of the transformations they could undergo to attain their ends. The former were considered to be friendly toward mankind, while the latter were hostile, and made use of all kinds of alluring devices to entice and destroy. In our young days the kelpie was represented to be a most beautiful horse, who used, on Sundays especially, to come forth from a deep pool or river, and, by its gentle ways, enticed those who were profaning the Sabbath to caress and fondle it. Upon its being patted, the hands of the victims adhered to the hide of the supposed horse; and he galloped off with them into the water, where they were drowned, or torn to pieces.

Among the curious superstitions which have come down to us from the practices of our ancient forefathers may be classed the notion that rain water collected in the hollows formed on the surfaces of large stones, was useful for the removing or curing of warts, wens, moles, and other fleshy excrecences. The water had to be applied by moonlight, with one's back to the moon, and its light streaming over the right shoulder. There were other remedies which were quite as curious, and equally effectual, but upon these we shall not enter at present. Water from a south running stream, and from under a bridge over which the dead were carried and the living walked, possessed many special virtues. During the operation of collecting and bringing home, there must be no looking backward.

Burns has made good use in his "Tam O'Shanter" of the notion that no evil being dare cross a running stream in pursuit of man; and in his "Hallowe'en" has preserved some curious practices regarding water. In his "Address to the Deil," he embodies the common notions with respect to water kelpies. An old writer remarks, "River water which continually moveth, runneth, and floweth, is very good for the seething of pease."

On the morning of the New Year, just at the moment 'twixt twelve

o'clock of the old and one o'clock of the new year, it was at one time a common custom to draw water from the *dead and living* ford. The water, so gathered, was considered sacred, being termed "Uisge Caisreachd," but in performing the ceremony the pail or vessel was not to be allowed to touch the earth, profound silence was to be observed during the operation; and the contents were drank as a powerful means of warding off the influences of evil spirits, witches, and the effects of evil eyes, during the course of the year. A similar ceremony was observed on Christmas eve. The skimming of the well, also a practice in Scotland, was productive of like results when partaken of. In the south, new ideas were attached and other benefits attributed to this ceremony, and the maid who was so successful as to secure the first *cream* of the well had the best chance of being the first to get married, and to make a fortunate match. This "skimming of the well" was also called the "Flower of the well," and is thus alluded to in an old poem:—

Twall struck,—twa neebour hizzies raise,  
 An' liltin gaed a sad gate;  
 The "flower of the well" to our house gaes  
 An' I'll tho bonniest lad get.

In some quarters it was a common belief that fresh water, just at the turn between the old and new year, became, for an instant, converted into wine. The skimming of fresh water was a custom among the Roman Augurs. They observed certain motions and circles on the surface of water so gathered, and predicted accordingly.

Highlanders, when they went to bathe in, or drink from, holy wells, approached by going round the spot from east to west, on the south side, in imitation of the sun's apparent daily motion. When thirsty, while travelling, they never willingly put their lips to well or stream, as to do so would infallibly ensure mishap, not to mention the possibility of imbibing water insects, or other extraneous matter that might prove prejudicial. Failing other ready appliances, they invariably make use of the palms of their hands. They also prefer to wash outside, and in a running stream, and are partial to the use of a dish of alderwood, which endows the water with unheard of virtues, besides purifying and cleansing it of hidden deleterious matter. Stagnant pools are their aversion, as being dark and gloomy, plentiful in aquatic vegetation and creeping things, they



harbour and conceal enemies who seek their hurt, and they avoid such pools as they would the plague.

Common every-day water may, by certain appliances, be made to supply the place of that taken from the consecrated well. We give an instance, one of many:—A gentleman, presently resident in Inverness, has informed us, that having had occasion to be in Tain on business for some time, about twenty years ago, he one day became suddenly unwell, and had almost fainted. His landlady got alarmed, and summoned to her assistance the neighbouring gossips. They said one to another, when in council assembled, “*Ghabh suil air;*” i.e., “an evil eye has affected him,” and thereupon took possession of, and undressed the patient partially, and laid him upon a table. Having done so, a common wooden pail was filled with water, to which were added the following coins—half-a-crown, a shilling, and a sixpence. They then stirred the water with a stick, going round the pail in procession during the process, and muttering an incantation which to the sick man was quite unintelligible. Thereafter he was washed with this consecrated water, and manipulated upon after a strange fashion. A stone of roundish form, somewhat like a pebble was dropped into the pail by the wise woman of the party. Strange to say, this stone burst into pieces with a hissing noise, and immediately the patient recovered his usual health. Probably, alarm at the proceedings may have aided his rapid recovery, and, as he afterwards remarked, his illness might have consisted only of a little squeamishness in the stomach. No doubt the stone was a bit of unslaked lime. In the case of an animal supposed to be affected by an evil eye, an eye-witness has informed us that the operation was somewhat similar. The water was given to the animal to drink, part of it put in the ears, and some of it sprinkled over the face and eyes, over the back, and the tail switched through the wetted hand, which dispelled the mischief. The vessel was then emptied, and if one of the coins adhered to the bottom, the disease was the effect of the evil eye, and a cure effected. If otherwise, the trouble resulted from some other cause, and was to be treated accordingly.

The natives of Barvas had a peculiar custom on the first day of May, of sending a man across the river at dawn of day to prevent any females from crossing it first, as that would hinder the salmon from ascending the river all the year through.

Gathering May-dew, and visiting wells, were 1st of May usages, and

in some quarters are still observed. Wonderful virtues were ascribed to May-dew, and the drinking of, and bathing in, holy wells, before or just at sun-rise. The spells of witches and fairies were thereby rendered harmless; no ill of any kind could befall the faithful observer of the requisite ceremonies for a whole year thereafter.

Fergusson, the poet, has recorded the practice of the Edinburgh youth of his day in the following lines:—

On May-day, in a fairy ring,  
We've seen them round St Anton's spring,  
Frae grass the caller dew-draps wring,  
To weet their ein,  
And water clear as crystal spring  
To syn them clean.

Under date April 20, 1826, a correspondent to Hone's "Every-Day Book" gives an amusing account of gathering May dew on the first of May. On the very summit of Arthur's Seat a moving mass was to be seen, dressed in all the colours of the rainbow, many of the male sex in kilt, all dancing round a May-pole. Whisky, or mountain dew, rather than May, was in repute. Groups were to be observed on knoll and flat, music and dancing were the order of the morn among all. At six o'clock the common folk gave place to their betters. Mr Pepys, that most wonderful of gossips, informs us that his wife went on a certain occasion to Woolwich for change of air, and to lie there all night, convenient as it were, so "to gather May-dew to-morrow morning," which she was told was the only thing in the world to wash her face with. Besides washing their faces with the May-dew, the maidens were wont also to throw it over their shoulders "in order to propitiate fate in allotting them a good husband."

During the middle ages, the priests, as they could not wean the people from their Pagan usages and superstitions, acted as the Romans had done before them. They took groves and fountains under their own special care; and in room of Pagan deities, the land, in fact all Europe, was inundated with saints. These came in shoals, indeed, to such an extent that to fill up the calendar and find the requisite number to suit every emergency that arose, hosts of beatified individuals had to be created. Under the pressure of necessity, and in the dearth of suitable names for the high dignity of saintship, Pagan gods and devils at one leap, as it

were, became Roman Catholic saints, as the calendar of the most Christian Church clearly sets forth even to the present day. Here again we have the curious jumble that so oft repeats itself in the world's history—the gods of one age become the demons of the next, and the so-called heroes of one age (though, in fact, the scourges of the earth, and hence properly called devils) become the gods of a succeeding age. It remained for the Church of Rome to purify this mass, dub the constituents saints, and allot them each his respective duty as presiding saint over well, wood, and fountain, and over church and city. It is related of St Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, that coming on a certain occasion to a fountain which the Magi honoured, and to which they paid offerings and made sacrifices, he consecrated the spot and diverted it to holy uses. In Cornwall it was a custom on Palm Sunday for the people to resort to a noted well, each bearing a cross, which, after giving something to the priest, they threw into the well. If the cross swam the bearer of it would outlive that year, but if it sank he was to die. It was during this period that the practice of *waking* and *dressing* wells, with a great deal of other mummary, came into vogue again with renewed vigour. The practice was old as the hills, but was gradually dying out, until fostered in the manner noted.

The waking of wells is the origin of many, nay, of almost all, the fairs and wakes still observed in country villages. 'Traces of it are to be found in the visits paid to the wells at Culloden and Munlochy Bay, in the neighbourhood of Inverness, of which more anon, not to mention a host of others. Well-dressing is still observed in England, especially in the counties of Derby and Cumberland. The religious element, however, has entirely disappeared. An old song of the fifteenth century has the following repentant observation :—

I have forsworne it while I live, to *wake* the well.

It was a custom in some places on the first Sunday after Easter to visit springs, wells, and fountains, carrying lights, in commemoration of the passage of the Red Sea. In Pagan times it had been a practice, on a certain day, at Oxford, to go out to a well or spring to dress it, present offerings of flowers, dance around, and sing hymns. The priests utilized the ancient habit of the people, and after various ceremonies, the same kind of performance was enacted, but on the latter occasion holy

songs were sung. Truly, "Darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people."

As might naturally be expected in a country like ours, so diversified with hill and dale, and so frequently refreshed by the dews of heaven, wells abound in quantity, quality, and variety, from Land's End even unto John O'Groat's. Every well had its virtue or tradition, and was of note at some time or other. The more noted or holy wells survived longest, and these are plentiful enough. Some, however, are only to be found in old books, and in the names of streets and other localities. They were consulted as oracles, and resorted to because of the healing influences ascribed to them. Some could cure insanity, some the leprosy peculiar to the country in bygone days. Some possessed virtues which destroyed or rendered null the evil influences of witches, fairies, and the devil; and some afforded, or were reputed to afford remedies against all and every kind of trouble both bodily and mental. The ceremonies attached, and the kinds of tribute exacted were singularly absurd. Pins, rags, threads, pebbles, shells, nails, buttons, bits of rowan tree, small coins (both silver and copper), locks of hair, fowls (in the case of a female a hen, and in that of a man, a cock), flowers, &c.—in fact, it did not much matter what the offering was, provided there was one—were left in the neighbourhood of the well, thrown into it, or paid to the presiding priest, who of course always expected coin or something useful. Then the ceremonies to be observed included standing in the water, kneeling in or near it, washing with, or bathing in, or drinking of it. There were some at which it was necessary to lie for a certain time near the water, on set days, and thereafter go round a fixed number of times, or until the recital of the Lord's Prayer had been completed, or a certain number of aves repeated and beads had been told. The ceremonies, in a word, were as various as the offerings were numerous, while both were equally unmeaning and ridiculous. Of course a faith that could remove mountains was also requisite, and with all conjoined a cure was inevitable, if not at once, most certainly in course of time. Alas! the faith so necessary was not always forthcoming, and consequently the expected virtue failed. Recourse was then had to the working of miracles. We have read of a poor cripple being brought to a well to be cured. The credit of the spot had been decaying in consequence of the marvels wrought at another not far off. The man could not summon



sufficient faith, the operation therefore failed, and he was whipped for his little faith.

Traces of wells are to be met with in abundance in our larger towns, while in some they pour forth their contents as plentifully as in the days of old. In Glasgow is a street called Stockwell Street. It is so named from the "Ratten Well," which is now a mess of impurities. Sir William Wallace with his followers is said to have encountered a band of Englishmen here, whom, of course, he defeated, and then threw into the well. As the work proceeded, Wallace exclaimed, "Stock it well ! stock it well !" and hence the name of the street. The impurity of the well is attributed to the putrefication of the dead bodies. Edinburgh and its vicinity had many wells of note, some of which still exist. In London there were several fountains of note. The notorious Hollywell Street had a famous one in its vicinity. Clerkenwell was that round which the parish clerks enacted their mysteries on sacred festivals. Aldgate Pump owed its virtue to the fact that the water permeated through the old churchyard. St Chad's was much in repute as an antidote against billiousness. A teacher in Kentish town used to visit it with his pupils once a week "as a means of keeping the doctor out of the house." It lay in Gray's Inn Road, near King's Cross. Camberwell, Walbrook, Bridewell, Sadler's Wells, all point to the existence of springs in these quarters. Linlithgow is, besides its familiar Crosswell, remarkable for its supply of water, which is attested by the following old rhyme, illustrating what distinguished certain Scottish towns :

Glasgow for bells,  
 'Lithgow for wells,  
 Fa'kirk for beans and pease,  
 Peebles for clashes and lees.

To which we may add,

Leith for bugs and fleas.

Inverness has in its vicinity more than one Welltown, and had at one time a well in Church Street, the name and site of which are preserved in the expression, "Well house," with which we have met occasionally in old deeds and books. It was on the site now occupied by the Bank of Scotland or thereabouts, and traces of its existence were observed a few years ago when the bank was being erected. Some curious stones of a dark brown colour, and of very soft nature, were found in the course of excavation for the foundation of the building. These were apparently

composed of sand, and in size and shape resemble the small biscuits called ginger nuts. They, and other curiosities also found at the same time, have possibly a story to tell could we but find the key to it. The Well-house immediately after the battle of Culloden was the scene of the murder of two unarmed fugitives by Rae, the Cumberland Volunteer, who wrote an account of the rising, quartered himself afterwards upon the Rev. James Hay, minister of the Scottish Episcopal Church at Inverness, with this advantage to the latter, that the one Philistine he was obliged to entertain kept the others at a distance.

Mr John Rhind, architect, Inverness, has informed us that while excavating for the foundation of the present Workmen's Club in Bridge Street, he found very perfect traces of what appeared at one time to have been an important well. The circular basin was lined with stone and had been carefully constructed. Water was still oozing up, and found its way into the adjacent sewers. Probably, in former ages, there were many similar to this in Inverness. A good specimen of this species is to be seen in the kitchen at Cawdor Castle.

In the vicinity of Inverness wells are very numerous, and as more or less interest attaches to all, we shall dwell upon them at more length, especially as hitherto most of them have escaped any particular observation.

Taking then the left bank of the river Ness, we have, at Englishtown, near Bunchrew, "Fuaran a' Chladaieh," or Sea-well, also called "The General's Well." Tradition says that General Wade resided for a time at Englishtown, and hence the latter name. Be this as it may, there is no doubt that a General Fraser had his abode there for some time, to whom the name may be more justly attributed. It has been suggested that the name might have arisen from the fact of the well being a place of "general" resort; but on the same ground every much-frequented one might, with equal propriety, be so styled. Old people called this, as we have said, the Sea-well, and we prefer to continue this name. It is covered by the tide to the depth sometimes of four feet, and we are informed by Mr Cran, Kirkton, on whose farm it may be said to be situated, that even when so covered, the cattle rush in and freely partake, for the water bubbles up with force and in volume sufficient to turn an ordinary mill-wheel. This well was once nicely enclosed with causeway, built up all round within, and made easy of access, of all which traces may yet be seen. There are three other wells of a similar kind



further down the Firth ; one near the Toll below Raigmore, but much further from the shore, and to which stepping stones point the way ; a second near the Church of Petty, and a third near Campbelltown. All these, being similarly circumstanced with regard to the tide, were supposed to possess virtues of a like kind, the most noted, however, being that near Englishtown. The number of people who used to flock out thither in spring was quite a nuisance to the farmer, for they trod down and spoilt his crops to gain access, and were not all content to take the same path. Flagon, pails, and other vessels were in request to convey the precious fluid home ; and there are many still living in Inverness and its neighbourhood who remember with glee taking part in this solemn and important labour. The drinking of this water was a special remedy for the curing of hooping-cough, not to mention a host of other troubles. In 1832, and still later during other visitations of cholera, all these sea-wells were much resorted to, in the hope that the use of the waters would keep away the scourge.

Next in order, as we approach Inverness, is "Priseag" Well. David Maedonald, an Inverness baker, and a kind of poet, in his verses entitled "The Invernessian Lasses," published in his collection called the "Mountain Heath," sings thus :—

Aurora gilds the orient sky—  
The god of day advances,  
And Flora sips the silver dew,  
While 'mong her flowers she dances.  
I'll hie me forth to *Priseag fount*,  
At base of my *Parnassus*—  
Drink freely, then Craig Phadrick mount  
To muse on Nessia's lasses.

In a foot note, he says this is "a spring which gushes out of one of the smaller rocks which leads up to Craig Phadrick, in the immediate vicinity of the village of Claehnaharry."

This neighbourhood is historic ground. Close by was fought the clan fight betwixt the Mackintoshes and Munroes in the year 1454, which is commemorated by the monument erected on one of the highest of the rocks, by the late Huntly Robert Duff of Muirtown, about 1834. This rocky spot, though a pretty sight by day, was considered a dangerous locality at night, being much frequented by the enemy of mankind and

his friends, who crouched and lurked in the many holes and corners on the wateh, and ever alert to annoy some luckless wight who might have to pass by. The aeh fiend, while in pursuit on one occasion of a benighted traveller, left the impression of his large palm on the faee of one of the roeks, having, as the story goes, sueceeded in depriving the vietim of a portion of his flowing upper garment. The fairies frequented the pleasant little plateau above and to the west of the spring. The remedy against the cantrips of the latter and the snares of the former was to be in possession, or to have during the day partaken of, the saered well. This well is said to have been blessed by Saint Kessog, who gives its name to Kessock Ferry, where he miraeulously eseaped being drowned while erossing, and sueceeded in bringing again to life his two charges, the sons of the King of Munster, after they had been drowned. The water of Priseag was powerful for the curing of sore eyes, the strengthening of weak eyes, and when silvered, that is, when a silver eoin had been immersed in a portion of it, and the mixture imbibed by man or beast, for averting the effect of the evil eye. A erooked sixpenee was the best kind of eoin, perhaps beeause it was more commonly met with in those days.

Around Craig Phadriek were several wells, of which some still exist. All were believed to be possessed of some predominating virtue, not to mention those attributed to springs in general. On the top of the hill itself, whieh the eountry people long ago ealled "Laraeh an Tigh Mhoir," "the site of the great house," there was said to have been a well. The same has been said of Knoekfarrel, near Dingwall, on which were two, one ealled St. John's and the other St. Thomas'. One of these was at one time ealled Fingal's, regarding whieh we beg to refer our readers to the "Prophecies of the Brahan Seer," where will be found some eurious eircumstances respecting it. With reference to the so-ealled wells on the tops of vitrified forts, we submit the following eommunieation kindly furnished by Mr Walter Carruthers, President of the "Inverness Seientifie Society and Field Club," whieh we think will settle the point as to their existenee :—"Mr Matthew Davidson, father of the late Mr James Davidson, superintendent of the Caledonian Canal, was stationed at Clachnaharry, in eharge of the Canal works in 1812, and in Mareh of that year, at the request of Mr Telford, the engineer of the Canal, he made a eareful report upon the character and construction of Craig Phadriek. One of

the points to which Mr Davidson directed his attention was, whence the occupants of the fort could have derived their supply of water. He says, —‘No well could be discovered in the Fort, nor have I heard of any traditionary one being there. Indeed, a well sunk in the rock would have been hopeless labour, as it could not possibly get any other supply than rain water. The water from condensed vapours on the sides of the hill would tricklo down the steep rock on all sides of the Fort. When the old trial pits within the Fort were cleared out on the 11th inst., the surface of the rock was found wet, as if a little water had been shed upon it. There is no water to be procured nigher than a spring in the plantation above the farm house of Kinmylies, about 300 feet perpendicularly below the summit of the hill. The south-west entrance has probably been employed for procuring water from this spring. From the scarcity of water and the total want of food, likewise the want of room, cattle could not be admitted for any length of time into the Fort. Perhaps the animal food of those ages was procured by the chase and hunting in the forests only.’ ”

Near the Muirtown Toll-house, and on the opposite side of the highway, is “Fuaran Ault an ionnlaid,” or the Well of the Washing Burn. It was neatly enclosed, and built round with stone by the late H. R. Duff of Muirtown, of whom we have already spoken, and has the following inscription engraved upon the top stone,—“*Luei Fontisquo Nymphis,*” *i.e.*, “To the Nymphs of the Grove and the Fountain.” At each corner, underneath this, are inscribed the letters “H. R. D.,” and the date “1830.” This fountain is pleasantly shaded, beautifully situated, and always affords a cool and refreshing draught. Being the reputed haunt first of the Druid, and afterward of the Priest, its virtues were accordingly numerous and extraordinary. More than one Druid Cirele stood in the vicinity, and later there was also elose by a chapel. Such spots were always favourites with both Druids and priests. The waters of this spring were reputed to be especially efficacious for the curing of cutaneous diseases. Among the ceremonies to be observed were washing in the passing burn and drinking of the well, both a certain number of times, with the customary formalities of genuflexions and prayers, and hence the name of “Well of the Washing Burn.” It is recorded that a soldier’s wife having immersed her child which was affected with scurvy in the healing waters of the fountain, the presiding saint, insulted at the indig-

nity, deprived the place of his presenee, and the virtues disappeared. Probably the poor woman, in her anxiety for the welfare of her infant, thought that by going with one bold stroke to the fountain head she would snatch all the benefits of the accumulated virtues at once, in all their force, and so neglected the usual tedious formalities. The above and similar instances of washing call to mind Elisha's message to Naaman the Syrian, of "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." The late Angus B. Reach, in a contribution to *Chambers's Journal*, gives a pleasing, fanciful sketch of this well and the locality generally. Montrose, while being conveyed a prisoner from Sutherland to Edinburgh, is said to have quenched his thirst here, the well, easily visible from the high road, having attracted his attention. That he did so allay the burning heat of the fever under which he was labouring, somewhere hereabouts, is attested by the following graphic picture from the hand of the author of the "Wardlaw Manuscript," which, though often cited, will still bear repetition. Under date of 1650, he writes,—“We are now to set down the fatal *preludium* of one of the noblest generals the age saw in Britain, whose unexampled achievements might form a history; were its volumes far bigger than mine, it would yet be disproportionate to the due praise of this matchless hero. But now I set down that which I was myself eye witness of. The 7th of May, at Lovat, Montrose sat upon a little sheltly horse, without a saddle, but a bundle of rags and straw, and pieces of rope for stirrups, his feet fastened under the horse's belly, and a bit halter for a bridle. He had on a ragged, old dark reddish plaid, and a cap on his head; a musketeer on each side, and his fellow prisoners on foot after him. Thus he was conducted through the country (from Caithness), and near Inverness, upon the road under Muirtown (where he desired to alight, and called for a draught of water, being then in the first crisis of a high fever), the crowd from the town came forth to gaze; the two ministers went thereupon to comfort him. At the end of the bridge, stepping forward, an old woman, Margaret M'George, exclaimed and brawled, saying,—‘Montrose, look above, view these ruinous houses of mine, which you occasioned to be burned down when you besieged Inverness;’ yet he never altered his countenance, but with a majesty and state befitting him, kept a countenance high. At the cross was a table covered, and the magistrates treated him with wines, which he would not taste, till allayed with water.



The stately prisoners, his officers, stood under a forestair, and drank heartily ; I remarked Colonel Hurry, a robust, tall, stately fellow, with a long cut in his cheek. All the way through the streets, he (Montrose) never lowered his aspect. The Provost, Duncan Forbes, taking leave of him at the town's end, said,—‘ My Lord, I am sorry for your eirenstances.’ He replied,—‘ I am sorry for being the object of your pity.’ ” Below the toll-house referred to, and in the bank of the Canal, was a small mineral spring which attracted attention some thirty years ago. It is now quite forgotten, or has disappeared.

Above the Inverness District Asylum, and immediately below the ascent to Craig Dunain, is “ Fuaran a Chragain Bhric,” or the “ Well of the Spotted Rock.” This was, in former times, a place of great resort, the waters, among other healing virtues, being supposed to be strongly diuretic. The bushes around were adorned with rags and threads, while pebbles, pins, and shells might be observed in the bottom of the spring. We have seen one juniper bush, close by, so loaded with rags and threads as to be hardly distinguishable. This was also a fairy well, and if a poor mother had a puny, weak child which she supposed had been left by the fairies in place of her own, by exposing it here at night, and leaving some small offering, as a dish of milk, to propitiate the king of fairy land, the bantling would be carried away, and in the morning she would find her own restored and in health. There was a similar well near Tomnahurich, and quite appropriately, for is it not the hill of the fairies ? and who does not know that they there interred with becoming pomp and all due solemnity the famous Thomas the Rhymer himself ? In Skye, there is another spring which was resorted to for the same purpose, and instances have been mentioned where the deluded parent found her child lying dead on the following morning. A more expeditious and effective method was to make a large roving fire, roll up the supposed changeling loosely, and place it on the top. The door of the house being left open, and water from the nearest sacred well sprinkled about, the suppositious child soon vanished up the chimney with a scream, while the real one was borne in on invisible hands, and deposited safely on the floor. If, after all, the child was not a changeling, it would slowly become unfolded from its wrappings, and roll gently to the earth. We should have observed that salt, to which everything evil has an intense aversion, had to be sprinkled over the fire in the foregoing ceremony.

On the Caplaich Hill, near about where the estates of Doehfour, Relig, and Dochgarroeh march, is "Fuaran Dearg," or the "Red Well." It is about two miles south of Dunain Hill. It is a chalybeate spring, and hence the name. There is another of the same kind at Auehnagairn. They are plentiful enough both in the Lowlands and Highlands of Scotland. Its circular stone basin was placed there by the late Colonel Charles Maxwell Maclean of Dochgarroeh in the year 1822. Of the Red Well it is related that on one occasion while the lairds of Grant and Muirtown were out hunting in the neighbourhood, the former became suddenly ill, but that on partaking of the water he was as suddenly restored. On a late occasion, a large shooting party sat down close by to luncheon, and after his betters had been served, and had gone away to resume their sports, the butler of an ancient house set about spreading an entertainment for "self and friends," and, as a preparatory step, placed three or four bottles of champagne in the well to cool. When the time came for the production of this precious fluid, lo ! it was found to have been spirited away. The poor butler looked stupid, not knowing what to say, and was in the position of the fox who, having caught a fat goose, after carefully hiding it, went to invite a friend to dine. But alas ! a man had observed the proceeding, removed the goose, and waited to see the result. The friends having returned, and finding no dinner, it was in vain to demonstrate that it had been there. The host looked abashed, the guest angry, and imagining he was befooled, gave his would-be entertainer a sound cuffing, which he received as meekly as if deserved. The butler made what amends he could. Soon after, the hunting party returned loaded with spoil. The homeward procession was formed, and the piper at its head blew up the return march, but in such fashion of gait and action, and such strange music did he discourse, that it was quite clear who the spirit was that caused the champagne to disappear in more than one sense. He had observed the actions of the butler, carried off and emptied the bottles himself.

The last well we shall draw attention to on the left bank of the Ness is that called the "General's Well," a little above the bridge leading into the Islands, and near the entrance to the grounds of Bught. From time immemorial it has borne the same name ; though some associate it with Wade, and others with Caulfield, both of whom were frequent visitors in Inverness during the construction of roads in the Highlands. The latter



resided for a time at Cradlehall, and gave the place that name after a kind of *lift* he had invented for conveying his guests upstairs, to save them the trouble of walking, or when they were in such a state after dinner that they were unable to mount the stairs. Others again attribute the name to Captain Godsman, who was local factor for the Duke of Gordon, and resided and died at Ness House. His remembrance is still kept alive in Inverness by the name "Godsman's Walk," once a favourite resort. He dressed up the well and neighbourhood, making all easy of access to the public. The spring, however, was put into its present condition about sixty years ago by a Mr Jamieson, who is still alive and resides at Newcastle. He was the son of Charles Jamieson, an Inverness silversmith, a man of some little note in his day, and a bailie of the burgh, of whom the older portion of the natives relate many curious anecdotes. Being so conveniently near the town, it was much frequented, and the number and variety of diseases it could subdue were proportionately great. Its waters were carried away in small and large quantities, far and near. Children and young people affected with rickets were brought to it, and manipulated upon with its waters. To strengthen the virtue of the water, silver coins of all sizes, together with small pebbles, were immersed in the well, and various curious ceremonies were observed. A gentleman, who on one occasion had witnessed the performance, has informed us that in one instance he saw a mother put into the water a half-crown, a shilling, a sixpenny piece, and a groat, as also some small round stones or pebbles. She then stripped her child, and with moistened hands operated upon its ribs and shoulders in a most extraordinary manner, and certainly not at all to the satisfaction of the child, for it howled all the time. This spot is still much frequented, but very few indeed, we imagine, attribute any virtue to the mere drinking of the water or washing with it.

Crossing over through the Islands in the Ness, the next well that occurs to us is that of Aultnaskiach, which is thus celebrated by the local poet already quoted. The poetry is the merest doggerel, but will serve to preserve the memory of the well. He sings, or attempts to sing, as follows :—

At Aultnaskiach's crystal well,  
What joys I feel no tongue can tell ;

Slinking, winking, drinking deep  
 Of the latent, potent, cheap  
 Hygeia's spring, pure, pure, from nature's hand,  
 The sacred wine of Nessia's mountain land.

The spring exhales a sweet perfume,  
 The flowers are gaily springing  
 By Aultnaskiach's crystal burn,  
 A choir of birds is singing—  
 I'll wander there wi' my sweet love,  
 Where hazels green shall screen us,  
 And talk of soul-fraught tales of bliss  
 With charming Jeanie Innes.

This well was situated on the brae fae behind the house at the bridge leading to Drummond.

Springs and wells are plentifully scattered over the fae of the Leys. From Balrobert onward to the Moor of Culloden, up and down the fae of the hill, they are to be met with. There are no less than twelve about Bogbain. These feed the burns and dams which turn all the mills in the valley of Millburn, and that to the east of the "Hut of Health." Near the Culeabock dam, the late Mr Forbes, chemist, discovered two mineral springs, which caused some little stir at the time.

In the neighbourhood of Leys Castle, are the Bog-well, Stable-well, Stirrup-well, and Road-well. Of none of these have we heard anything very partiular. Near Balmore of Culduthel, are "Fuaran na Lair Bàna," or the "White Mare's Well," the fabled resort of a kelpie of very destruetive propensities; and the Holy-well, which supplies the farm. The latter had no speeial eharacteristics to distinguish it from others of that elass, save that it frequently needed a thorough eleansing to keep it in healthy eondition. Its saeredness is attributed to its eonnection with the eeremonies of the aneient religion. Druid eireles and stones with rude figures seulptured thereon were once of frequent oeeurrenee all over the Leys, and some of them still remain. Opposite Balmore, by the side of the private road leading to Leys Castle, we have the "Schoolmaster's Well," near which William Maekenzie, one of our Gaelie poets, lived, and "taught the young idea how to shoot," and the possessor thereof to *shout*, for he was very severe, and that during the spae of forty years. He bore a loving regard towards this well, and like another Horae eelebrated its virtues and the beauties of the locality in song. Though severe during

school hours, he was as a poet should be, kind and tender-hearted. His memory is still fresh among the few of the old people who yet survive. To his forcible separation from his beloved well and the neighbourhood he attributed the ill-health which overtook him upon his removal to Inverness, where he died shortly after. The simple-minded in the district, because of the poet's affection for the fountain, attributed to it virtues of which he never dreamed, and long held it in reverence accordingly. It is now, however, sadly neglected, and what with improved drainage and other modern inventions, promises soon to disappear altogether.

By far the most noted well in this quarter was "Fuaran na Ceapaich," or the "Keppoch Well." We say was, as it has disappeared, being covered up and ploughed over, the waters being partly diverted into the adjacent burn, and partly carried into the mansion-house of Culduthel. It was situated above the present smithy, nearly opposite Oldtown of Culduthel, and came, strange to say, from Keppoch in Lochaber, a distance of about sixty miles away. If, however, we consider, this is not after all so very strange. It is related that the famous nymph Arethusa, not liking the attentions of the river god Alpheus, fled from him over hill and dale, and having implored the assistance of Diana, was changed into a fountain. The pursuit still continued, and to aid her votary the goddess opened a path for her under earth and sea; the lover still followed in hot haste, as a god assuredly might, and both rose up again near Syracuse in Sicily, having come all the way from Elis in Greece. Nay, more, we have just quite lately heard of a spring that disappeared from the district of Strathdearn, and re-appeared in an out of the way place in the wilds of Canada, merely to gratify the whim of a silly old man who was unwilling to go and join the rest of his family in the land of promise, to which they had removed many years before, and where they were prospering beyond their fondest hopes, because of his attachment to the spring at the end of his old hut. Being at last compelled to move, we may imagine his astonishment when he recognised the presence of his dear old friend in the new country, and also of that of a large white stone that stood by its side, on which he was wont to sit on a summer Sabbath's eve reading his bible. In the Leys, water very often appears and disappears in the most annoying and mysterious manner, sometimes gushing gleefully forth as if possessed with a spirit of destructive frolicsomeness, to the dismay of the farmer, in the very midst of a cultivated field. We

have been told by a farmer in the district, that during a hot season some years ago, when water was scarce, and consequently had to be conveyed at considerable expense and trouble from a distance, he was exceedingly surprised one day to see a fountain burst open in the very centre of his dairy. This might be said to be a little too convenient, and far from ceremonious. However, the phenomenon lasted throughout the season, and as suddenly disappeared. Now that a better system of drainage has been introduced, such sights will become rare. But to return to the Keppoch Well, we are told its patron saint or presiding genius, being insulted in Lochaber, removed his presence and the health-giving waters to their present site in the Leys. By a person who in his youth was wont to frequent the spring it is described as being possessed of a mineral taste, and of a darkish hue. It was situated in a grove of trees, and afforded a rich supply. He says it was much resorted to from all quarters, and large quantities were carried away for home consumption. No matter what the malady, such was the faith in the beneficial effects of the water that recourse was had to it, and the application of the water was both external and internal. It was considered a special and effective specific in cases of diarrhœa. Another peculiarity about this well was that it could inform those who consulted it whether a sick person would recover or not. For this purpose a piece of wood was placed at the bottom, with a stone above it, and the name of the patient pronounced; if the wood within a given time bubbled up with the water to the surface and floated away, it was life; but if, on the contrary, it remained at the bottom, death was certain. The well also declared whether plighted troth had been violated. If a pin or nail were dropped into the water and descended with the point downward all was safe; but if, on the contrary, the pin or nail turned round and went down head foremost, the accused was guilty. Wells possessed of similar powers are common in England and Wales. No tribute appears to have been paid to the Keppoch Well, which is singular. The usual ceremony, however, of walking round the place from east to west, approaching by the south, had to be observed.

The only other well in the immediate neighbourhood of Inverness we shall notice is that at Culcabock village, called "Fuaran Slagan Dhonna-chaidh," or the "Well of King Duncan's Tomb." Tradition, always stubborn in what it asserts, will have it, in spite of any proof to the con-



trary, that King Duncan was murdered at Inverness, and buried at a spot near Draikies, not far from this well, called King Duncan's Tomb. The valley through which this spring discharges its contents, and that of Millburn to the west, were in old times considered uncanny places, being believed to be the resort of witches. Here they met safe from intrusion, and practised their devices ; among others, that of making clay images of their victims, and placing these in the burns, where they gradually wore away, and so in proportion did their representatives.

Having exhausted Inverness and its immediate neighbourhood, we now proceed to notice such other celebrated springs as may occur to us. Cul-loden presents us with several, amongst the most remarkable of which are "Tobar na Coille," or Well of the Wood, also styled the Lady, or St Mary's Well ; "Tobar Ghorm," or Blue Well, from its colour ; "Tobar na h-Oige," or the Well of Youth, because washing therein, and drinking thereof, restored youthfulness, or its similitude to the devotee ; and "Tobar nan Cleireach," or the Well of the Priests, as they washed thereat preparatory to engaging in the religious rites performed at the adjoining places of worship. St Mary's, lately more generally designated "The Culloden Well," is the best known, and has been the most frequented in the district. It is situated in the birch wood, above the mansion-house of Cul-loden, at a distance of about two miles from Inverness, and is surrounded by an imposing array of venerable trees of various kinds. A mountain rill of trifling proportions wends its way seaward, at a slight distance to the east, through a slope of gentle declivity. The well emerges to sight from amid the centre of a small platform lying on this slope, and discharges its overflow into the mountain rill. Peat hags, quaking bogs, deep ravines, and lofty trees form the predominating features in the surrounding landscape. At all seasons a solemn silence, a sacred, mysterious gloom, an oppressive stillness reign around ; and a kind of superstitious awe is experienced as one approaches the Holy Well. Bird and beast disappear in terror at the slightest intrusion, even the wild discordant music of the mountain stream, as it rushes through a deep and rugged ravine in the vicinity, seems hushed. The spring, as we have said, is situated on a small elevated plateau, is encased in a stone basin both around and beneath, and at one time had a cover over it, and was under lock and key. It is about a foot and a-half in diameter, the depth being nearly two feet. The water is chalybeate, and the flow is con-

stant, though gentle. A circular stone building, about the size of an ordinary small sitting-room, and of the same height, encloses the well, the floor being laid with stone flags. A wooden seat runs round inside; and vacant niches indicate that at one time, there were presses in the wall. In former days, a wooden roof of conical form, tapering to a point, enlivened with neat, rustic-work lattices, surmounted the building. Now, however, there only remains the circular stone enclosure, which is covered with sod. The door-way of the structure looks eastward to greet the rising sun. Directly to the west, at the distance of a few yards, lies a large circular excavation, which is faced with stone in the manner of an ordinary stone dyke. Probably this was also flagged in its floor. It is now gradually filling up with earth and rubbish, while here and there some shrubs have taken possession, and appear in a thriving condition. There was communication betwixt the well and this large basin, by means of a drain or pipe, traces of which are still visible. Here, probably, the pilgrims of old performed their ablutions; or, perhaps, this artificial tank was filled before hand to meet the demands of the crowds who gathered together on the first Sunday in May, as it was utterly impossible that all could drink from the fountain head within the limited period during which doing so possessed any virtue. The trees and shrubs all around are adorned with variously coloured rags, bits of thread and string. Names, initials, and dates, carved in all manner of styles, deface the trunks of most of the finest trees. The latest date we observed was 1870. Even at the present day, we are informed, the spot is not without its frequenters, but can scarcely credit that anybody is so deluded as to attribute any virtue to the water. In former days, and that too, not very long ago, the Culloden Well was very largely patronised by the surrounding districts. Inverness, in particular, contributed a large quota of servant girls and shop lads, not to mention others. The proper season to pay a visit was, as we have remarked, the first Sunday in May, and in order that any benefit the water could bestow, might be fully and completely reaped, it was absolutely necessary for the devotee to be on the ground immediately before sunrise. Consequently, on the previous Saturday night, crowds might be seen wending their way from all quarters to the sacred fount. When we call to mind that there was a public-house, at a distance conveniently near on the line of march, that the throng, consisting of male and female, was a very miscellaneous one indeed, and that no early



closing Aet was as yet in force, we can more easily imagine than describe the wild scenes of riot and dissipation that were invariably enacted. Latterly the custom of visiting this well has fallen very much into disuse, being denounced from the pulpit, and prevented as much as possible by the proprietor. The usual tribute of rags, bits of thread, small coins, pins, &c., were paid here as elsewhere. Leaving a rag meant the laying aside of the trouble with which the party might be afflicted. Coins and other contributions thrown into the waters propitiated the good will of the saint, or averted the power of the evil one and his emissaries to inflict mischief. If any person was bold enough to remove a rag, he was sure to inherit the disease supposed to be attached thereto. Many years ago, a pleasant well-kept path conducted the visitor from the high road to this sacred spot, and a woman, possibly yet alive, acted as a kind of priestess, providing dishes, opening the door of the building which guarded the precincts, and generally kept the place and approach in order. In Roman Catholic times a small chapel or altarage, dedicated to St Mary, stood near, of which even the very ruins have long since disappeared.

Craigack Well on the north side of Munlochy Bay, on the northern side of the Beaully Firth, was frequented by the people of the eastern part of the Black Isle for much the same purposes as that at Culloden. It is situated to the east of a neglected, or worked-out free-stone quarry near Bay Cottage. The usual offerings and ceremonies were performed, but the proper time to visit the spot was before sunrise on the first Sunday of May in the old style. The people, old and young, the hale and hearty, as well as the sick, infirm, and desponding, thronged to the fount at the approach of sunrise, as to a fair. Drinking of the water restored health to the invalid, ensured soundness of constitution, for a year at least, to the strong, and rendered null, in favour of all alike, the effects of the evil eye and witchcraft. This spring was also dedicated to the Virgin Mary. St Andrew's Well, near Kileoy, in the parish of Killearnan, and St Colman's, in that of Kiltarn, were similarly frequented and honoured.

In a cave at Craigiehow, in the neighbourhood of Craigack, is a small spring which issues from a rock in its side. This water, no doubt, from its mysterious position, was believed to possess extraordinary properties, and was especially effective in cases of severe headache and deafness. One of the reputed prophecies of the Brahan Seer is thus recorded :—" In

the Parish of Avoch is a well of beautiful, clear water, out of which the Brahan Seer, upon one occasion took a refreshing draught. So pleased was he with the water, that he looked at his Blue Stone and said—‘Whoever he be that drinketh of thy water henceforth, if suffering from any disease, shall, by placing two pieces of straw or wood on thy surface, ascertain whether he will recover or not. If he is to recover, the straws will whirl round in opposite directions, if he is to die soon, they will remain stationary.’”

But to return to the parish of Petty, from which we have somewhat wandered, we have to observe further, that besides being rich in springs, the district is remarkable for the amount and variety of objects of historical, archaeological, and natural interest, which it offers to the attention of the diligent student. Before finally quitting the district we shall note two of these. The one is a holed stone, on the eastern confines of the parish, called “Clach-an-tuill.” The water collected in this holed stone was supposed to cure wens. The other is “Tobar-na-Goil,” or Boiling Fountain, so named on account of the intermittent jets consisting of the purest white sand and water it shoots up. We have seen four of these in operation at once. So soon as the accumulating sand had closed up one mouth, another burst forth into play. This spring is near the Free Church of Petty, and lies in some marshy ground, amid a clump of trees on the opposite side of the high way leading from Inverness to Nairn. It is rectangular in form, and is both wide and deep. The thirsty exhausted traveller as he gazes on the pure, pellucid fount, as the water joyously bubbles up, may break forth into song like the ancient Hebrews in the days of Moses, when Israel sang this song—“Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it; the princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves.” Near by is “Tor-nan-Cnaimhean,” or the Hill of Bones, which, doubtless, commemorates the result of some lawless slaughter of ancient times, or it may have been a place of execution.

In our further notes and observations we shall set down what we have to say without pretending to pursue any particular order.

At Wester Rarichie, in the Parish of Nigg, is a spring termed “Suil na Bà,” or the Cow’s Eye. The story goes that it once flowed through the trunk of a tree, about four hundred yards south-east of its present site, and that having experienced some insult or injury, it diverted its course to

the present position. Similar conduct is related to have been pursued by a host of insulted springs other than those already referred to. Like many others *Suil na Bà* undoubtedly possesses medicinal virtues, and was wont to be largely patronised by the suffering as well as the superstitious. The waters act as an aperient, and though now neglected were once much in vogue, as is shown by the following extract from the Kirk-Session Records:—"July 7, 1707.—In regard many out of the parish of Fearn and several other parishes within the Sheriffdom, profane the Sabbath by coming to the well of *Rarichies*, John and William Gallie, &c., are appointed to take inspection every Saturday evening and Sunday morning, of such as come to the well, and to report accordingly." Near by is a *fairy* well at which puny children were exposed under the usual circumstances, and with similar results. The parish of *Nigg* also rejoices in springs with the following imposing names:—"Tobar na Slàinte," or the Well of Health, and "John the Baptist's Well."

In the *Lews* there is a spring, the water of which never boils any kind of meat, however long subjected to the influence of fire. This was, as has been quaintly observed, probably on account of the fuel being wet, and the amount of heat insufficient. Here also is a well dedicated to *St Andrew*, which was much consulted regarding the probable fate of persons in ill-health. A wooden bowl was laid gently on the surface of the water, if it turned towards the sun the patient would recover, but if in the contrary direction, he was to die. In the case of *St Oswald's*, *Newton*, if a shirt or shift, according to the sex of the invalid, were thrown into the water, and it swam, all was well, if, on the other hand, it sank, death was inevitable. In this same island adders of about two feet in length are sometimes to be met with, which annoy the cattle, and occasionally by their sting or bite, cause death. The remedy was to wash the affected animal and give it to drink of the water in which the head of a similar reptile had been steeped.

As might be expected wells are numerous in the *Isle of Skye*. In the parish of *Strath* we find "*Tobar-na-h-Annait*," or the Well of *Annat*. According to some she was an ancient river deity and had a place of worship in the vicinity. A granite obelisk, still standing near the manse, is called "*Clach-na-h-Annait*," or the Stone of *Annat*. The term *Annat* is of frequent occurrence in the Highlands. In *Perthshire* we have the burn and glen of *Annat*, in *Inverness-shire* the Farm of *Annat*, and *Ach-*

nahaunet. Various modifications of the word are also to be met with throughout Scotland, in such terms as Nethy and Abernethy. She seems to have been largely worshipped in the Western Isles where traces of her temples are yet discernible. This goddess could assume the form of a horse or bull, and may consequently bear a near relationship to the German Neck or Neckkar. Places of worship dedicated to her were situated at the junction of two streams, and the appropriate sacrifice was a horse. In the same parish we have also "Tobar Ashig," or St Asaph's Well; "Tobar Chliaman," or St Clement's well. Kilmuir in Skye is not behind hand in the number and virtue of its sacred wells and lochs, as has been pointed out by the Rev. Alexander Macgregor in his appendix to the "Prophecies of the Brahan Seer."

In the isle of Barra there is a spring on the top of a hill which, strange to say, was believed to produce cockles in embryo, and then discharge them into the sea to grow big and fat. It is needless to observe that these were, as a matter of course, the best cockles that could be gathered. The distant St Kilda also had its healing springs. "Tobar-na-buadh," or the spring of virtues, was chiefly effective in cases of deafness and nervous disorders; and "Tobar-nan-Cleireach," or the Priests' Well, reminds us of early practices already referred to.

In the centre of "Eilean Mourie," in Loch-Maree, in Ross-shire, there was a well, now long since dried up, which was considered to possess great virtue in cases of insanity. It was at one time in great repute, and sufferers from all quarters in the district were carried hither to undergo the treatment necessary to effect a cure. The patient was first made to drink of the water of the fountain, then to kneel at the foot of a huge oak partly covered with ivy, present an offering, and thereafter to bathe thrice in the loch. This ceremony had to be repeated until a cure was effected. The patient, when refractory, was tied to the tail of a boat and towed round the island. It was considered a good omen if the well was full at the time of the experiment. It is reported that on one occasion, a mad dog was thrown into the well; the animal of course recovered, but the healing virtues of the waters departed for ever, and in process of time, the well dried up. The tree of offering, the oak above referred to, is covered over with copper coins, pins, buttons, &c., inserted in the fissures in its sides. A gentleman has informed us that on one occasion he observed even some bottles; but surely these were not pious offerings. He



also stated that he saw the breast bone of a fowl, the "merry thought." This Eilcan Mourie, in turn the holy isle of Druid and Priest, was the scene of many heathenish and superstitious practices in the days of old, mention of some of which will be found in "Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire," the curious work of the Rev. Dr Kennedy, of Dingwall.

St Fillan's Well in Perthshire was also noted for the curing of insanity. After various ceremonies, partaking alike of Druidism and Popery, the patient was dipped, then tied with ropes and shut up in the chapel all night. Thereafter a bell was put upon his head amid much formality and mummary. The bell was a wonderful one, if stolen, it could regain its liberty, and celebrate its triumph, as it marched homeward, by ringing all the way. There was a bell at one time in the church steeple of Broadford which rang mysteriously or miraculously once a week, summoning the sick to come to be cured at the well in the church-yard. The bell disappeared, and, of course, the well lost its health-giving properties.

Peterhead rejoices in the possession of both a Tea and a Wine Well, while the Island of Stronsay is blessed with a Beer one. Of this last it is said that it "is clear as crystal and not unpleasant, is full of fixed air, as may be easily discovered by any who drink some glasses of it; for they will soon find themselves affected in the same way as if they had drank some fine, brisk, bottled, small beer." The waters of a spring in Eaglesham, in Renfrewshire, cured the muir ill in black cattle, and quantities were wont to be carried from the spring to a great distance; and the waters of Wysbie Well, in Kirkpatrick-Fleming, in time of great drought brought relief to the cattle suffering with the red water when they were made to drink of them. A spring in the Parish of Monzie was held in great repute up to about 1760, when alas! two trees which overshadowed it fell, and then the restorative power of the water also departed. The presiding patron of Yclaburn or Hielaburn, "the burn of health," in Shetland, was propitiated by each visitant throwing three stones, as a tribute, as he approached, into the source of the salubrious waters, and in consequence of the fame of the spot a considerable pile was raised. The spring of the Burn of Oxhill, in Banffshire, was frequented because of its restorative effects in cases of chincough, and that there might be no appearance of partiality there was also a well in this same county specially set apart for old spinsters, called the "Old Women's Well." A fount in Kilmadun, Argyleshire, devoted itself to the curing of scurvy,

while another in Bute made the curing of sore eyes and the mumps its speciality. The holy hill of Strathdon has on its summit a stone with a deep hollow, in which water is almost invariably to be found. The superstitious imagined that the water sprung out of this stone, and they accordingly attributed extraordinary health-giving properties to this lone and mysterious cistern of the dews from heaven. The waters of a well in Kennethmount, Aberdeenshire, were capable of bringing relief to man and beast, and in acknowledgment of the blessing received, the offerings bestowed consisted of portions of the clothes of the sick and parts of the harness or furniture of the cattle.

The Routing Well of Monkton, near Inveresk, was believed to be able to predict storms, because of the rumbling noise which was heard during the prevalence of high wind. This accomplishment was as nothing compared with that enjoyed by the Well of Tarbat, in Argyleshire. This well, also called "The Lucky Well of Beathag," like Æolus of old, could command the winds. One acquainted with the spot has furnished us with the following account:—"It is situated at the foot of a hill fronting the north-east, near an isthmus called Tarbat. Six feet above where the water gushes out there is a heap of stones, which forms a cover to the sacred fount. When a person wished for a fair wind, either to leave the island or to bring home his absent friends, this part was opened with great solemnity, the stones carefully removed, and the well cleaned with a wooden dish or clam shell. This being done, the water was several times thrown in the direction (or air) from which the wished for wind was to blow, and this action accompanied with a certain form of words, which the person repeated every time he threw the water. When the ceremony was over, the well was again carefully shut up to prevent fatal consequences, it being firmly believed, that were the place left open, it would occasion a storm, which would overwhelm the whole island. This ceremony of *cleaning the well*, as it is called, is now seldom or never performed; though still there are two old women of the names of Galbreath and Graham, who are said to have the secret, but who have cause to lament the *infidelity of the age*, as they derive little emolument from their profession."

In these days the Strathpeffer and other mineral springs both north and south are much frequented because of the medicinal virtues attributed to them. Of the former Sir George Stewart Mackenzie, Bart., in 1810, writes as



follows :—" Indeed the once famed virtues of the Strathpeffer spring are beginning to be neglected. It has been celebrated for curing all sorts of diseases, particularly scrofula, and affections of the skin. It used also to be frequented by women who had been disappointed in their expectations of having children. The fresh air which circulates around the spring, and the pleasantness of the country in which it is situated, by tempting invalids to walk abroad, probably contribute more than the water to the restoration of their health." There is doubtless more truth in this last remark than the careless will admit. In the Parish of Duthil we have "Fuaran Fionnarach," or refreshing well, a belief in whose healing qualities is not yet quite extinct. The waters of certain lochs in Sutherland and Ross-shire are reputed to be able to effect various cures, especially in cases of headache and deafness. The ceremonies to be observed are, to walk backwards thrice into the water, dipping at each advance to land, and to leave some small coin in the loch. There must be no looking backward either in advancing into, or retiring from the water, and the patient must in conclusion walk straight home without speaking to, or taking notice of anybody, and especially he must not look behind or around.

Among the Ochil hills is a fairy well near which lived at one time a penurious farmer who had offended the "good folk." They are resentful when annoyed, and seldom fail in having their revenge. The dairy maid on one occasion carried her butter to the well to be washed as usual before sending in to market. She had, however, no sooner thrown the lump into the well than a small hand took hold of it and both disappeared under the crystal waters, while a voice sang—

" Your butter's awa'  
To feast our band  
In the fairy ha'."

Near the same district is the "Maiden Well," a reputed resort of the fairies and the haunt of a water sprite of a dangerous and bewitching kind. When invoked a thin mist arose over the well disclosing a lady of most ravishing beauty. The result, however, was always fatal to the would-be wooer, for he was invariably found dead next day by the well side.

"Fuaran-Allt-Ciste-Mararrat," or the well of Margaret's Coffin, in Badenoch, situated in a wild and lonely spot, marks where, according to tradition, the ill-used and unfortunate lady, who pronounced the curse of barrenness against the Mackintoshes, perished. "Tobar-nan-ecann," or

the Well of the Heads, by Loch-Oich side, commemorates, as the inscription in English, Gaelic, French and Latin, on the monument erected over it attests, the sternness and completeness of Highland revenge as carried out in the 16th century.

The Camp Wells of Longside, in Aberdeenshire, with the adjacent "battlefield," point to some ancient engagement, probably betwixt the Danes and the natives of the district; while the Sword Well of Dumfries marks the site of some Border encounter twixt the Scots and English. The contemptuous abbreviation of Kate's Well, the name of a spring, in the vicinity of the Kirk of Shotts, rescues from utter oblivion in that quarter the name of St Catherine of Sienna, to whom a chapel had been dedicated there in 1450. St Michael's Well, Edinburgh, now completely forgotten, was in the 16th century a place of great resort, for we are informed that in the year 1543 an act of penance is ordered to be performed at the fountain of St Michael, "*in via vaccaria, vulgo at Sanct Michaelis Well in ye Cowgait, in publica placea.*"

Old charters supply us occasionally with very curious and interesting information. They also preserve old names of localities and boundaries. A document of date 1221, regarding the lands of Burgie, near Forres, makes mention of two springs, "Tubernacrumkel" and "Tubernafein," as forming part of the marches of the lands described. These uncouth looking words are explained in the following equally uncouth looking language in a parchment attached to the charter:—"Tubernacrumkel, ane well with ane thrawin mowth, or ane cassin well, with ane crwik in it," and "Tubernafeyne, of the grett or kemppis men callit ffenis, is ane well." In modern phraseology these terms are respectively and without disguise, "Tobar nan Crom-ghiall," the wry-mouthed well; and Tobar nam Fiann, the Fingalian Well. They are considered to correspond with, and to be represented by, those now called the "Deer's Pool," and "Willie's Well." This bit of antiquity, besides being interesting, is of some value as tending to prove that even as early as upwards of six hundred years ago, little or nothing was known of Ossian's heroes, and that Gaelic which has now all but disappeared from the neighbourhood of Forres, was at a very early period the language of the district. Glenshee, in Perthshire, has also a Fingalian fountain. In the Great, commonly called the "Golden" Charter of the Burgh of Inverness, granted by King James VI. on the 1st of January 1591, mention is made of the well or

fountain called Toburdonich, that is "Tobar Domhnuich," the Sunday or Sacred Well.

In confirmation of the previous remarks, and in order to bring the practice of old customs more vividly before our readers, we here introduce an excerpt from a communication made to Hone's "Every Day Book" in 1826:—

"In 1628 a number of persons were brought before the Kirk-Session of Falkirk, accused of going to Christ's Well on the Sundays of May to seek their health, and the whole being found guilty, were sentenced to repent 'in linens' three several Sabbaths. 'And it is statute and ordained that if any person, or persons, be found superstitiously and idolatrously, after this, to have passed in pilgrimage to Christ's Well on the Sundays of May to seek their health, they shall repent in sackcloth and linen, three several Sabbaths, and pay twenty pounds Scots *toties quoties* for each fault; and if they cannot pay it the bailies shall be recommended to put them in ward, and to be fed on bread and water for eight days.' They were obliged, for the preservation of the charm, to keep strict silence on the way to and from the well, and not to allow the vessel in which the water was to touch the ground."

"In 1657 a mob of parishioners were summoned to the Session for believing in the powers of the well of Airth, a village about six miles north of Falkirk, on the banks of the Forth, and the whole were sentenced to be publicly rebuked for the sin. 'Feb. 3, 1757, Session convened, compeared Bessie Thomson, who declared she went to the well at Airth, and that she left money thereat, and after the can was filled with water, they kept it from touching the ground till they came home.' 'Feb. 24. —Compeared Robert Fuirde who declared he went to the well of Airth, and spoke nothing as he went, and that Margaret Walker went with him, and she said the belief about the well (repeated the creed while walking round), and left money and a napkin at the well, and all was done at her injunction.' 'Compeared Bessie Thomson, declared she fetched home water from the said well, and let it not touch the ground in home-coming, spoke not as she went, said the belief at it, left money and a napkin there; and all was done at Margaret Walker's command.' 'Compeared Margaret Walker, who denied that she was at that well before, and that she gave any directions.' 'March 10.—Compeared Margaret Forsyth, being demanded if she went to the well of Airth to fetch water therefrom, spoke not by the way, let it not touch the ground in home-coming? if

she said the belief? left money and a napkin at it? Answered affirmatively in every point, and that Naney Brugh or Burg directed them, and that they had bread at the well with them, and that Nance Brugh said she would not be afraid to go to that well at midnight her alone.' 'Compeared Nanee Brugh, denied that ever she had been at that well before.' 'Compeared Robert Squir, confessed he went to that well at Airth, fetched home water untouching the ground, left money, and said the belief at it.' 'March 17.—Compeared Robert Cochrane, declared he went to the well at Airth and another well, but did neither say the belief nor leave money.' 'Compeared Grizzel Hutchin, declared she commanded the lasses that went to that well, say the belief, but discharged her daughter.' 'March 21.—Compeared Robert Fuir, who declared that Margaret Walker went to the well of Airth to fetch water to Robert Cowie, and when she came there, she laid down money in God's name, and a napkin in Robert Cowie's name.' 'Compeared Janet Robinson, who declared that when she was sick, Jean Mathieson came to her and told her that the water of the well of Airth was good for sick people, and that the said Jean, her good-sister, desired her fetch some of it to her goodman as he was sick, but she durst never tell him.' These people were all 'publiely admonished for superstitious carriage.' Yet within these few years, a farmer and his servant were known to travel 50 miles for the purpose of bringing water from a charmed well in the Highlands to cure their sick cattle." Although we have by no means exhausted all that might be said on this curious and interesting topic, we feel we have enlarged sufficiently for the present, and beg to refer such of our readers as wish to pursue the subject further to such works as the following:—"Chambers's Book of Days," "Hone's Every Day Book," "Hunt's Folk-lore of Cornwall," An Article in the *Celtic Magazine* on Holy Wells by the Rev. Alexander Macgregor, M.A., and Hampson's "Kalendars of the Middle Ages."

In conclusion, to show that such superstitions and customs have, alas! not quite yet, become things of the past, we append the following graphic but melancholy picture with which the *Inverness Courier*, so late as August 1871, furnishes us, of the belief and practice that then lingered in one outlying district amongst us:—"At a loch in the district of Strathnaver, county of Sutherland, dipping in the loch for the purpose of effecting extraordinary cures is stated to be a matter of periodical occurrence, and the 14th



appears to have been selected as immediately after the beginning of August in the old style. The hour was between midnight and one o'clock, and the scene, as described by our correspondent, was absurd and disgraceful beyond belief, though not without a touch of weird interest, imparted by the darkness of the night and the superstitious faith of the people. 'The impotent, the halt, the lunatic, and the tender infant were all waiting about midnight for an immersion in Lochmanur. The night was calm, the stars countless, and meteors were occasionally shooting about in all quarters of the heavens above. A streaky white belt could be observed in the remotest part of the firmament. Yet with all this the night was dark—so dark that one could not recognise friend or foe but by close contact and speech. About fifty persons, all told, were present near one spot, and I believe other parts of the loch side were similarly occupied, but I cannot vouch for this—only I heard voices which would lead me so to infer. About twelve stripped and walked into the loch, performing their ablutions three times. Those who were not able to act for themselves were assisted, some of them being led willingly and others by force, for there were cases of each kind. One young woman, strictly guarded, was an object of great pity. She raved in a distressing manner, repeating religious phrases, some of which were very earnest and pathetic. She prayed her guardians not to immerse her, saying that it was not a communion occasion, and asking if they could call this righteousness or faithfulness, or if they could compare the loch and its virtues to the right arm of Christ. These utterances were enough to move any person hearing them. Poor girl! what possible good could immersion do to her? I would have more faith in a shower-bath applied pretty freely and often to the head. No male, so far as I could see, denuded himself for a plunge. Whether this was owing to hesitation regarding the virtues of the water, or whether any of the men were ailing, I could not ascertain. These gatherings take place twice a year, and are known far and near to such as put belief in the spell. But the climax of absurdity is in paying the loch in sterling coin. Forsooth, the cure cannot be effected without money cast into the waters! I may add that the practice of dipping in the loch is said to have been carried on from time immemorial, and it is alleged that many cures have been effected by it.'"

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